

Animals & Men

The Journal of the Centre for Fortean Zoology



ON THE TRAIL OF THE NAGA – THE 2000 CFZ EXPEDITION TO THAILAND;

Lake Monsters in Switzerland; Geordie Big Cats
Mammoths in Thailand; Rediscovery of the Caspian
Tiger; News and more..

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ANIMALS & MEN # 23

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Animals & Men

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THE GREAT DAYS OF ZOOLOGY ARE NOT DONE...

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another issue of *Animals & Men*. Her Majesty already used the term a few years ago but the year 2000 has truly been an *Annus Horribilis* in the lives of the CFZ and I think I speak for us all in saying that we are heartily glad that it is over.

About the only bright spot in the year was Richard's momentous trip to Thailand, an account of which takes pride of place in this issue. It is undoubtedly the most important thing that the CFZ have accomplished since our 1998 expedition to Puerto Rico and Mexico in search of the chupacabra.

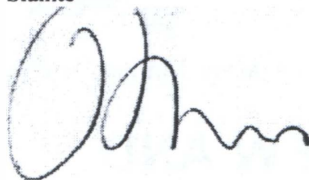
Apart from that it has been a lousy year and 2001 can only get better even if Arthur C Clarke is wrong and we ain't gonna discover any megaliths on the moon, and things like that!

We have several exciting new projects planned for the new year. The long awaited 2000/1 Yearbook will be available in early January and we are taking orders now. We shall also be publishing a timely reprint of Andy Roberts'

seminal work on Big Cats in the north of England.

This issue, as well as proving (if any proof were needed) that he is not only the world's only Gothic Cryptozoologist™ he has also proved that he is one of the silliest by portraying me in a seasonal guise as the fabled purple rail of Hiva-Oa which is undoubtedly one of the most obscure creatures in the annals of cryptozoology.

May you all have a happy and peaceful New Year
Slainte



Jon Downes
(Editor)



NEWSFILE



Collated this issue by Jon and Richard

NEW AND REDISCOVERED



SIGHTING OF IVORY BILLED WOODPECKER

According to the Associated Press in New Orleans on November 4th, forestry student David Kulivan claims to have seen the ivory-

billed woodpecker, widely believed to have been extinct on the mainland of the USA for decades.

"There was a lot of scrutiny and I'm glad because I'm sceptical about these things as well," says Kulivan, who studies at Louisiana State University. "I don't take a sighting, especially of an ivory bill, lightly. 'If I wasn't absolutely positive of what I saw, I never would have opened my mouth."

Kept quiet at first, Kulivan's account has caused a considerable squawk in the bird-watching community. Birders, as they are known, compile "life lists" of birds they've seen far and wide, sometimes on several continents.

The ivory-billed woodpecker, with sleek white stripes running down the back of its largely black body and its distinctive ivory-white beak - and the male with its red crest and arching red plume on its head - would go to the top of the list for many birders.

"Somebody described this as the Holy Grail of birding," says Steve Shively, a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries official. "I read an e-mail from one guy saying he really didn't believe the sighting, thought the guy was deluded but agreed if the bird were there he would trade every bird on his life list for that one."

Shively estimates that if the sighting were

confirmed, tens of thousands of bird enthusiasts from around the country, even the world, would try to pour into the thick and uninviting swampland that forms the Pearl River wildlife refuge about 30 miles north of New Orleans.



Many believe Kulivan saw pileated woodpeckers, which are about the same size and fairly prevalent in the area. They look similar enough that numerous false ivory bill reports come in every year from people who, following interviews with experts, are found to have all but certainly seen pileateds.

Kulivan, who sat motionless and silent as the birds went about their business, points to key features that, to him, distinguished the birds as ivory-billed woodpeckers. The female had a black crest, as ivory bills do, while pileated females have red crests, Kulivan notes.

The fact that the male and female were together was another hint, as ivory bill mating pairs stay together while pileateds generally do not.

"Then there was the ivory-white bill, and the call is completely different," he says.

REDISCOVERY OF JAPANESE WOLF?

"There probably would be something we'd have to do, maybe get enforcement agents out there to possibly limit people in the area at one time," Shively says. Kulivan does not consider himself a birder. The day he claims to have seen the ivory bill - April 1, 1999 (he insists this is not an April Fool's joke) - he was turkey hunting.

Dressed in camouflage, he sat quietly waiting for a gobbler when a pair of woodpeckers landed on a water oak about 25 yards away.

Following the article in issue 20 by Richard Freeman about the mystery animals of Japan, it seems that one of them may have been rediscovered. In Japan there were once two kinds of wolf. One was a subspecies of Grey Wolf called the Yezo Wolf, which although extinct in Japan may still be found in small numbers in the Soviet Union. The other species was referred to as a miniature Japanese wolf sometimes called the Shamu or Shamanu.



One Sunday in July this year a high school principal in Kitakyushu spotted an animal resembling a Japanese wolf which was believed to have been hunted to extinction in 1905. Satoshi Nishida, 60, the principal of a High School in Fukuoka, succeeded in photographing the animal and announced his findings at a convention of a society for wild animal protection, held at the agricultural department of Tokyo University on Nov.12. Although the animal cannot be accurately classified from the existing evidence, experts who saw the photos said that it is most likely a Japanese wolf, or nihon okami, according to informed sources

On the evening of July 8, he was camping on a central Kyushu mountain when he encountered the animal. He took about 10 pictures of the canid with an auto-focus camera. Two of the best photos were taken from about three to four meters to the left side of the animal, and show it to be about one meter in length.

The animal in the photographs is believed to be a lactating female. Nishida sent the photos to Dr. Yoshinori Imaizumi, a former chief at the National Science Museum's animal research division and a top expert in the study of Japanese wolves, to get his opinion.

Imaizumi noted several characteristics inherent

to Japanese wolves, such as the rounded tip of the tail, and the distinctive bright reddish-orange colour of the hair behind its ears and on the outside of its legs.

"EXTINCT" MOTH REDISCOVERED IN THE UK

EDITOR'S NOTE: The pages of this magazine and indeed other cryptozoological publications over the years have argued at length whether the discovery or rediscovery of new species of insect is worthy of discussion by cryptozoologists. We would argue that when, as in the following storey, the events take place in an area as well explored by naturalists as the UK that the answer has to be yes.



A moth species – The New Forest Burnet which was believed to be extinct in Britain when it disappeared from the south of has not been seen in its native Hampshire for almost 80 years. However, there have been repeated sightings on the west coast of Scotland and it has been disclosed that the species, known as *Zygaeba viciae*, has trebled in numbers in the past year.

Dr Mark Young, of Aberdeen University's zoology department, described it as *being "back from the dead"*. The moths have chosen a south-facing cliff, with a mild climate, and are less at risk from collectors than at their previous New Forest home.

"From being thought extinct they are now doing well and it is one of the major success stories of insect conservation," said Dr Young. *"Collecting is not as common as it was and because these moths are endangered it is illegal to collect them. However, we are still keeping their location secret as they are very vulnerable."*

The moths, which are also found in low alpine areas of Europe, were spotted in the New Forest between the 1880s and 1927, with no other sightings in Britain.

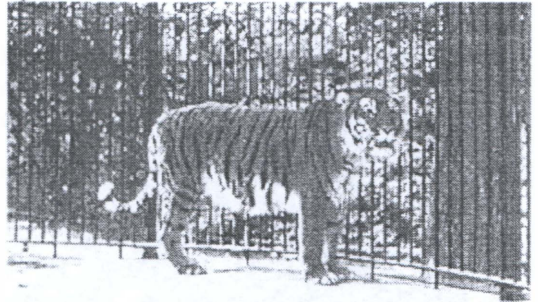
Experts feared that they had left for good until 1963 when a colony was discovered in Argyll. However, as the years passed the moths disappeared again until 10 years ago when a group of 12 was found on a grassy ledge. Numbers have now reached 1,000. Dr Young, chairman of the Burnet Moth Study Group, said:

"They are among the rarest moths in Britain and we cannot become complacent. The moths make cyanide and if birds try to eat them they will end up with a mouthful of cyanide, so they are pretty safe from predators. But because of this they sit around exposed and are vulnerable to collectors."

REDISCOVERY OF CASPIAN TIGER?

The only subspecies of tiger ever to have been found in Europe may still be living secretly high in Turkey's Cud Mountains. Local hunters say they have seen Caspian tigers along the remote border with Iraq. Yet the species was supposed to have become extinct when the last one was shot in 1970.

Now an expedition is to be launched next year to try to find the tigers the world forgot. Dr Given Eken, of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Turkey, said that the expedition would also try to confirm sightings of Persian leopards and monitor the population of striped hyenas.



Dr Eken said: "The Caspian tiger is considered to be extinct but in South-east Turkey local hunters claim to have seen tigers in the mountains. The sightings have been in a mountainous area the size of the Netherlands. "Not many people live there, the habitat is in pristine condition and there has never been a survey of the wild mammals and birds so we do not know what is in there.

Source: THE EXPRESS ON SUNDAY
05/11/2000

THREE NEW SPECIES OF LEMUR DISCOVERED

Scientists working in Madagascar announced in Chicago in November that they have discovered three previously unknown species of mouse lemurs, the world's smallest primate. The newly discovered lemurs represent a small but encouraging sign to conservationists. Madagascar is the world's only home to about 40 species of lemurs, including two previously known species of mouse lemurs.

An international team confirmed the new varieties by genetic tests as well as by small differences in their skulls, teeth and other physical characteristics.



"It's incredibly rare to discover a new species of primate, let alone three new species," said Steven Goodman of the Field Museum of

Natural History in Chicago, who was one of the participants in the study.

NEW SOUTH AMERICAN RODENT

On the 28 February 2000 it was announced that a previously unknown "giant tree rat" has been found in the mountains. The animal, the size of a domestic cat has been discovered in South America.

The powerful tree-living mammal, with large claws, was found during a research trip to a previously unexplored part of the Vilcabamba mountains in Peru.

Experts are excited by the find because the animal represents a new genus with characteristics unknown in the rodent family.

The pale grey animal, with a white streak from head to snout, was discovered by Louise Emmons, a researcher with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, during a survey of the cloud-covered mountains near the Inca city of Macchu Picchu.

Ms Emmons has named it the *Cuscomys ashaninka*, after Cusco, the Peruvian town close to where it was discovered, and its indigenous Ashaninka people.

The *Cuscomys* was found only because it had been killed seconds earlier by an

Andean weasel. Alive, it might never have been seen. Now scientists are planning more expeditions for other examples of this "new" animal.

REDISCOVERY OF SANDHILL DUNNART



On the 17th Apr 2000 the Australian Environment Minister Mr. Iain Evans announced that six specimens of a very threatened Australian marsupial named as the Sandhill Dunnart have been found by a local naturalist on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula. It was the first sighting of the carnivorous marsupial in the area since about 1969.

The Sandhill Dunnart, which is a little larger than a house mouse and can grow up to 25 cm, is more commonly found in the remote sand dune and desert plain country of the Great Victorian Desert in South Australia and Western Australia.

GIANT SNAKE IN SOUTH AFRICA?

The story began on April 26, 2000 when the *Discovery Channel* website announced that residents of the community of Ezitapile in South Africa's Eastern Cape have reported seeing a strange snake-like creature lurking near their homes. Captain Mpofana Skwatsha of the Aliwal North police reported that area livestock become agitated whenever the strange yellow beast is near.

The animal has been described as having a body the shape of a 20-quart barrel with a head like a horse and a mane down its back. It has been spotted in the surrounding indigenous forest with its long tail coiled around a tree. There have been no reports of attacks on locals or livestock.

RICHARD FREEMAN'S COMMENT:

The description of this creature having a mane recalls crested and horned giant snakes reported from other locations in the tropics.

In my article about the CFZ Thailand expedition in the autumn which is printed elsewhere in this issue I have speculated that these animals may in fact be surviving mastoids from the Pleistocene era. The sightings of a similar creature in South Africa, does, I believe, lend weight to my theory.

BHM/Man-Beasts



NEW EVIDENCE FOR THE YOWIE?

The Yowie has always been one of the most problematical of worldwide BHM phenomena because of its sheer zoological unlikeliness. However on the 8th September 2000, amateur cameraman Steve Piper captured the mystery animal on video-tape in the Brindabella ranges, south of Canberra.

He claims that he was filming what he thought was a large kangaroo in a rocky gully, when he realised it was far too big to be a kangaroo. The bewildered Mr Piper has delivered the footage to an un-named research group investigating possible yowie sightings. The footage has been touted as the best of its kind since the alleged Bigfoot sighting at Bluff Creek in the United States in 1968.

A researcher says it is the most conclusive evidence to date that a Bigfoot creature may be roaming the Australian wilderness. Further

investigations will now be carried out in the Brindabella mountains where two yowie sightings have been reported in the past century.

ANOTHER YOWIE SIGHTING

On April 18th 2000 a Queensland man claims to have had a close encounter with a yowie - but the hairy beast has once again eluded capture on film. The latest yowie-spotting, claimed by 23-year-old Ashley Mills, took place last Friday on a property near Taree in northern New South Wales where other recent yowie sightings have been reported by locals.

Mr Mills, a security industry worker from Bribie Island and a member of the yowie-hunting Australian Hominid Research, was by himself at the time of the sighting - although three other yowie hunters had made the trip.

Carrying only a stills camera, he had gone about 100 metres from the house on the property when, he claims, a rock landed at his feet. *"Then a kangaroo ran out of the bush and another rock landed a bit further away from me,"* Mr Mills said.

"I walked down to where that came from and a kangaroo ran out and another rock landed at my feet. Then I heard this crunching sound ... boom, boom, boom, but it was getting fainter. I ran around the lantana and he had his back to me. He

wasn't huge but he was cross ... that kangaroo was meant to be his lunch".

The creature, described as around 2.40 metres tall and covered with greyish-brown hair, bounded up the hill and away from Mr Mills.

"There was no way I was going to keep up with him up this hill," he said. "All I had was a hand camera and I only saw him for about four seconds." Mr Mills described the sighting as "very exciting" as it had been the first by a member of his group during daylight hours.

BIGFOOT CONTROVERSY

On the 7 July 2000 The Associated Press reported that two researchers looking into reports of curious tracks on the Lower Hoh Indian Reservation in NE Washington State have come to different conclusions about whether they might have been caused by Bigfoot.

Dr. Jeffrey Meldrum, assistant professor of anatomy and biology at Idaho State University, concluded there was not enough factual evidence to continue an investigation. The other, self-proclaimed Bigfoot tracker Cliff Crook, believes the evidence is so great he is headed back to gather more data.

Crook, who was on the scene a day before Meldrum, said he found many clues leading him to believe the tracks were

created by a Bigfoot, or Sasquatch – a large, hairy creature that has been reported around the world but is most closely identified with the Pacific Northwest.

"I went expecting to find bear tracks, but on June 30, my initial investigation led me to believe this was not a bear or a human prankster. This was for sure a Bigfoot," Crook told the Peninsula Daily News.

Crook, 59, is a co-editor of the journal Bigfoot Trails. He's a Bigfoot tracker, a Sasquatch detective, an assembler of some 400 plaster footprints. He and his wife, Carol, teamed as technical advisers for the Bigfoot film, "Harry and the Hendersons."

On June 30, he added one more track from the Lower Hoh Reservation, along the Pacific Coast in extreme northwest Washington state. *"This year, we already have had 19 reports from the Pacific Northwest alone. Of those we have thoroughly investigated nine of them and learned a lot,"* Crook said. He estimates the animal on the Hoh Indian Reservation stands about 8 feet, with feet 17 inches long and 7 inches wide. With the imprint that was left in the ground, he estimates its weight to be about 600 pounds.

Meldrum, who has studied the Bigfoot phenomenon for four years, sent a researcher out to investigate the area where Gene Sampson and Steven Penn first reported seeing tracks. Meldrum's crew did a thorough search of the land, looking for any physical signs of Bigfoot such as hair and footprints. *"Our general take was that there was something going on their properties, but it was not attributable to*

research of Bigfoot we have seen in the past," Meldrum said.

Crook is setting up a base camp outside of the Hoh reservation in hopes of gathering more information.

BIGFOOT SIGHTING

In early July 2000 the local newspaper in Selma, Oregon reported a Bigfoot sighting by local psychologist Matthew Johnson. He claims that he heard, smelled and saw the Pacific Northwest's mythical Bigfoot while hiking Saturday [July 1] with his family at the Oregon Caves National Monument.

"It was very tall, it was very hairy," Johnson said.

He said he was squatting in the woods near one of the monument's backwoods trails when he spotted the creature standing upright about 60 feet away, hiding behind a tree and spying on his wife and three children.

Shortly before the sighting, his family had just detected a pungent, musky scent on the trail and heard some deep, guttural groans in the woods nearby. Rangers checked the area Sunday and found nothing unusual, officials said.

TEMPERATE TARZAN

Possibly the most bizarre crypto news story of the year comes from British Columbia where throughout the year there have been reports of a Bigfoot seen accompanied by a blond-haired boy!

More than two dozen people claim to have seen the human youngster dressed in animal skins and loping along beside the towering man-beast. Some investigators have speculated that the mystery boy may be the missing survivor of a plane crash that occurred in the area 11 years ago, raised from childhood by Bigfoot. *"This is the most tantalising development in Bigfoot research to take place in decades,"* said Dr. Rob Worrier, a zoologist involved in the hunt for the elusive forest creature. *"It suggests that Bigfoot is not some shambling monster as he is often depicted, but a gentle and intelligent being capable of nurturing behaviour and compassion."*

The boy, described by eyewitnesses as lean and wiry with long, matted hair, was first spotted in late March by dentist Dr. Arthur Gosten who was camping in the Rockies with his family. The Vancouver man was awakened in the early morning by the frantic cries of his 12-year-old daughter. When he emerged from his tent, he saw her pointing into the woods.

"She said that a wild boy' was stealing our food," Dr. Gosten recalls. *"I looked where she was pointing and saw this half-naked boy slinking off into the trees with an armful of canned goods."*

Shouting after the child, Dr. Gosten gave chase and caught up with him at the edge of a clearing. *"I couldn't believe my eyes. The boy was standing next to an enormous, hairy, man-like creature at least 8 feet tall,"* Dr. Gosten said. *"The*

thing took some of the boy's load, then they ambled off together into the woods, both of them walking with the same hunched-over, ape-like stride." Since that sighting, at least 33 people have reported seeing the wild boy and his hairy companion. Witnesses have included clergymen, forest rangers and even members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In many cases, the mismatched duo have been heard exchanging guttural sounds as if talking. "This youngster has all the earmarks of a feral child - a child that has had no human contact and has been raised by an animal," said the Seattle-based Dr. Worrier.

The fact that his gait is similar to the Bigfoot and that they can communicate is evidence that the creature is his surrogate parent." Researchers believe that the wild-boy sightings may be connected to the 1989 crash of a private plane carrying a party of French tourists visiting the region. The crash left the pilot and four passengers dead - including young mother Madeleine Dusoire. Madeleine's baby Marcel was missing and the remains of the 1-year-old infant were never found. Unfortunately the story originally appeared in the *Weekly World News* and should therefore be taken *cum grano salis*.

OTHER NEWS

SCOTTISH OWLMAN?

According to an article about Scottish mystery animals in the *Scottish Evening*

Mirror of the 18th November 2000 In August 1997, Alex Brown was driving through Glencoe late at night when he saw "*a large black bird creature in the sky. It was about eight feet across and resembled a pterodactyl.*"

The article also mentioned a similar beast sighted by Anne Jones in the Duddingston area of Edinburgh.

Anne said "*I was woken up in the early morning by an intense white light shining into the room.*

I got out of bed to see where it was coming from and when I got to the window, my attention was drawn to a tree in the garden.

I saw this thing sitting there. It was crouching on a large branch and at first I thought it must be a bird.

But then I thought 'It's far too big'. It looked about the size of a man. It had wing-like structures on its back. But looked human.

I can't understand how I wasn't terrified. I tried to wake my husband but he seemed to be in some kind of trance."

OLD WHALE TALE

It seems that whales can live to a far greater age than has hitherto been supposed.

The Times 18/11/2000 reported that analysis of tissue samples of harpooned bowhead whales and also finds of ancient stone harpoon heads lodged in the blubber of animals killed between 1978 and 1996 seem to prove that

creatures can live to an age in excess of two hundred years and that indeed some of these whales would probably still be alive today if they hadn't been killed by hunters. Using a new technique, biochemists looked at the frozen creatures' eyes and analysed the decay of proteins in the lenses to work out how old they were.

The oldest lived from about the time Mozart died until the birth of the Beatles and was the oldest mammal – and probably the oldest animal – ever found.

It rivals the 200-year-old giant tortoises and giant clams that hold the record for the longest lived animals.

A FROZEN ZOO?

Potentially the most exciting zoological story for years was printed in *The Sunday Times*, March 5, 2000. We make no apologies for quoting most of it verbatim.

SCIENTISTS have located a frozen "zoo" of prehistoric creatures under the Siberian permafrost which they intend to retrieve for a cloning experiment. Members of an expedition which last autumn airlifted a mammoth from its icy tomb now claim to have evidence of an extraordinary menagerie of extinct creatures.

Bernard Buigues, the French leader of the expedition, said he knew of another 18 locations which would yield the animals' bodies in a well-preserved state. He is to begin the search for woolly rhino, steppe lions, giant deer, foxes and hardy breeds of horses from

20,000BC within the next month. He will cover an area extending 300 miles to the northwest and northeast of the Siberian town of Khatanga, 500 miles north of the Arctic Circle. *"Evidence from bones and tusks collected by nomads has alerted us to the location of the sites,"* said Buigues.

He has travelled extensively in the Taymyr Peninsula in Siberia in the past 10 years, and believes he may also have found signs of human settlement from 2,000BC on the shores of Lake Taymyr.

Competition among rival teams of scientists has prompted veiled accusations of underhand tactics. There are suggestions that one group offered the nomads of the region villas on the Côte D'Azur in exchange for successful leads. The prospect of discovering more animal remains in the ice has revived hopes of finding cells in sufficiently good condition to re-create some of the animal life of the Pleistocene era.

Larry Agenbroad, professor of geology at North Arizona University and one of the principal scientific advisers to the expedition, believes it may be possible in the long term to introduce the animals to North America.

Agénbroad, who has spent 30 years working with mammoth remains, said: *"There is no significant difference between restoring prehistoric animals and restoring modern creatures such as grizzly bear and bison. Contrary to*

received opinion, hunting, not just climatic change, also played a part in the demise of the mammoth."

Rival Japanese researchers also have ambitions to emulate Jurassic Park with a sanctuary for the offspring of frozen mammoths and other extinct creatures. Professor Akira Iritani, of Kinki University, hopes to find a suitable habitat for mammoths in a 100 square mile wildlife reserve in the Russian republic of Yakutia, known as Pleistocene Park.

It is currently home to Yakutian horses and Canadian bison. This weekend Iritani said he believed mammoths would lumber across Siberia again within the next 20 years.

"We went to the park and looked at it by helicopter. It is fine in the summer, but we will have to provide some shelter for the mammoth in winter. We could easily get our hands on ancient horses and the ancestor of the Siberian tiger," he said.

He envisages releasing up to 40 mammoths in the park, and hopes to revive the species by cross-breeding with female elephants. He believes each generation will approach more closely the genetic inheritance of its forefathers as the females are impregnated with more DNA from the male mammoth. The first step begins next month when a team of 25 scientists starts to thaw out the mammoth hacked out of the ground by Buigues. Images taken with ground-penetrating radar underpin their hopes that the 21-ton

block of ice and mud contains a complete mammoth. Previous finds have been lost because of flawed excavation methods. But what if, against all hope, the block contains no more than bones and a few tufts of matted hair? Buigues insists the search will go on. *"We are already planning for the next four years. There are many, many more carcasses in the ice."*

NEWSFILE XTRA: MAMMOTHS IN THAILAND?

Editor's note: Literally as we were going to press the following news item arrived by e-mail from Paul Cropper.

Again we are printing it in full, together with an analysis by Richard Freeman.

Royal snaps mystery herd of tuskers.

THE Royal Forestry Department of Thailand will investigate the sighting of a herd of large, hairy elephants wghich were seen in the seen in Chiang Mai by Princess Rangsrinopadorn Yukol, who has dubbed them, "Thai

mammoths".

The Princess released the hazy aerial photos of her sighting, taken from a royal helicopter, to the local press on Sunday. Princess Rangsrinopadorn described the herd of about 20 wild elephants as bigger than normal with long hair on their backs and long tusks, some over three metres. She said she had taken video shots of the hairy herd while making forestry surveys from a helicopter in Chiang Mai's Om Koi district in 1984. Apichart Kittikallyawong, secretary to the Forestry Department, said the department had no evidence that the country had the type of elephant described by the Princess. "Our local officials will get to the bottom of this," he promised.

The Princess yesterday told The Nation that a group of US conservationists had also recently reported spotting the unusual pachyderms in Om Koi, prompting her to tell her story and distribute pictures to the press.

"The elephants were frightened by my helicopters and ran wildly into the jungle. While they were running I could see their hair moving clearly, and I have given them the name of Thai mammoths," the Princess, a noted forestry conservationist, said.

A conservationist from the Wildlife Fund of Thailand, Hannarong Yaowalert, took another view of the long-haired beasts.

"Given that the climate of our country is tropical, I think it would be unlikely to find such a species of elephant here. If they existed, we would have discovered them long ago," he said.

Hannarong said the foundation was aware of only two living elephant species, the Asian and African.

However, Samarn Prangwacharakorn, Doi Saket district chief, said the herd photographed by the Princess did indeed exist. He said Karen living in Doi Mon Chong in Om Koi district said they saw the herd of 27 elephants in nearby mountains in Doi Mon Chong but never disturbed them because they were very wild. Samarn said he had informed the Princess that the herd was still where she had seen it.

Saman refused to speculate whether the beasts were remnants of the mammoths which roamed the planet long ago. The Princess said she had checked with other local government officials and they had all confirmed to her that the animals were still alive. She to the public to help conserve this rare herd.

Source: THE NATION
(BANGKOK) 05/12/2000

COMMENT: BY RICHARD FREEMAN

The idea of mammoths in a tropical climate may seem strange. This is because we generally think of the woolly mammoth, but there were many different species of mammoth, some

inhabiting warmer climes. However before we get too excited I draw your memories to a near identical case investigated by John Blashford-Snell.

Reports from Nepal of giant elephants with high, domed skulls led some to speculate these animals were mammoths. Later it was the stegodont another extinct elephant that was favoured.

It now seems that these huge individuals were the result of a small gene pool in the area. Small differences such as a higher skull and larger size were magnified by inbreeding caused by this.

This may well be what has happened in Thailand. A small group of elephants have developed more body hair than usual and larger tusks.

Having said this Indo-China seems to be the World's greatest hot bed for new species discover and an evolutionary backwater were archaic species like the Vu-Quang ox still linger. If anybody's got the money to investigate I'm your man!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although the issue of the same newspaper for the 7th December seems to confirm the story and adds that not one, but TWO expeditions are currently searching for the massive beasties, we have not as yet been able to obtain copies of the pictures, so until we do, the matter must, I am afraid, rest.

OBITUARIES

TRACY FREESTONE 1967-2000



Sadly our friend Tracy Freestone died suddenly, at home in Exeter, on 9 December this year.

Good friend (and ex-girlfriend) of *Animals & Men* deputy editor, Graham Inglis, Tracy often got roped into helping with collating and stacking our magazines, only occasionally breaking off to have a can of lager or a cigarette on the CFZ doorstep.

It seemed fairly appropriate to us that someone whose life had been a string of cock-ups should affiliate to the CFZ.

Her life can best be summed up by Shelley, another on/off associate of the CFZ and star of the recent Owlman movie: "*Tracy was a good person, but she was always hardcore...*" We can't add anything to that.

Party on Tracy!

NOBBY c. 1975 - 2000

It has been a sad year for the staff of and visitors to the Centre for Fortean Zoology. Within only a few weeks of the demise of Toby the CFZ Dog (see last issue) our two elderly cats Isabella and Carruthers, who had both been known and loved by all visitors to the CFZ over the years joined Toby in the great Hereafter.

Later in the year Flump, the Chinese soft shelled turtle (*T. sinensis*) who for ten years has resided on our landing also died. Then only a week before we went to press we learned that another old animal friend of the CFZ had also passed on in March of this year. His name was Nobby and he was probably the largest Giant Gourami in captivity.

I have been visiting him occasionally at his home at the Crew's Hill Water Garden Centre in Enfield, Middlesex for over twelve years and was very saddened to hear of his passing.

In his memory and because his story would undoubtedly be of interest to the people who read this magazine we are reprinting a story and pictures we originally wrote twelve months ago for *The Planet on Sunday*. JD

FISH YOU WERE HERE

Nobby, the record-breaking giant gourami who has been delighting visitors to a garden centre in Crew's Hill, Enfield for 16 years, is now thought to be the largest fish of her species in the world.



30 inch long Nobby is thought to be at least 25 years old. Her apparently-morose appearance has caused some misunderstandings, with some visitors contacting the RSPCA to report a "miserable fish" – not realising that fish faces can't display emotions in the manner of humans. The RSPCA were in fact consulted over Nobby's accommodation and have approved the outsize tank. Other visitors can be less than complimentary towards Nobby's looks - "Don't call her ugly," pleads a notice on the tank, saying that Nobby is sensitive towards such criticism. She is hand fed with processed peas (and other titbits) and on special occasions enjoys the odd Glacé cherry. But funning aside, there is a serious message behind Nobby's lugubrious exterior. The centre

rescued her from a broken tank in a private home. These days even the smallest tropical fish shop sometimes sells fish which can, like Nobby, grow to an immense size and which need specialist care.



Unfortunately many people buy fish of these species as babies and are totally unprepared for the rigours of looking after their pets when they achieve adulthood.

When they grow too big for their tanks they often inadvertently break them. Nobby is rapidly becoming a tourist attraction at Crew's Hill, but she remains a chilling reminder th at some animals that make fine public exhibits are totally unsuitable pets!

WELCOME TO THE NEW CFZ POOCH

The idea of the CFZ without a doggy would be unthinkable. Although we were all devastated when Toby was put to sleep last June, and we decided

that it would be a long time before we acquired another dog, it was not to be.

She actually belonged to our friend Tracy Freestone and even before Tracy's tragic death (see above), Tessie had become the new CFZ doggie due to a change in her circumstances.

So, despite our best intentions we ended up acquiring another dog within only a few months of Toby's demise.



A great CFZ welcome, therefore to Tessie, a seven year old blonde bitch (and as everyone knows various members of the CFZ can never resist blonde bitches)...



On the Track of Geordie big cats

By Mike Hallowell



I've investigated a few mystery animals in my time, but having one present itself, metaphorically if not literally, on my doorstep was indeed a pleasant surprise.

I live in the village of West Boldon, Tyne & Wear. Next to West Boldon is East Boldon, and then just a bit further towards the coast again is Cleadon Village. And it was here, on the morning of 11 January 1999, that The Alien Big Cat [or ABC] was first spotted.

Iain Smith, a reporter with the *Shields Gazette*, was tipped off about the creature's debut and went to interview the witness.

The man, who did not wish to be named, told Iain that he saw "what looked like a very large cat running past the back of my house at about 12 noon. It was completely black, had a small head and a long, curled tail. I'm sure it was a

big cat of some description. I saw it running past the gaps in my hedge."

Another witness told Iain that he was a bit of an amateur naturalist and had been a keen birdwatcher for 35 years. He also admitted to being a sceptic who, had he been told about the cat by anyone else, "would not have believed them in the slightest."

Seeing something with your own eyes is a different matter, however, and our twitcher has now joined the ranks of the believers.

"I'm not too sure what it was", he told Iain, "but because of all the reports from places like Devon, and all the rumours of the beast of Bodmin Moor, you immediately think of a puma or a panther. Judging by what I saw, that is not too far off the mark."

Iain's story appeared in the *Gazette* the following evening with the headline, *Cleadon Big Cat Is On The Prowl!* At once a wonderful ambience of paranoia took hold, and Charles Fort would have just loved it.

Retired colonels started polishing their blunderbusses and a local Neighbourhood Watch support demanded that the SAS be drafted in. Cleadon, a relatively sedate village which had hitherto resisted adopting the nickname Excitement Central, suddenly had a crisis on its hands.

Bravely Going Where No Hand Has Set Foot

The first I knew of the Cleadon Big Cat was that evening when I read Iain's article. The following morning, at 5.30am, I set off in hot pursuit. Cleadon Village at dawn on a January morning is not a fun place to be. Take a walk past the village pond and up Cleadon Lane and you will find yourself in a Dickensian environment filled with darkling skies, silhouetted trees and an old church. The steely silence is only broken by the odd hoot, croak, rustle or other noise unidentifiable by us townies. If ABC was lurking, I'd find him here.

At 6.10 precisely I happened to be standing at the fence of a field on the east side of the lane. In the field were four ponies. Three stood together, whilst the fourth ambled around some distance away.

Suddenly the lone pony whinnied and galloped over to the others. All four were now agitated, and continually shuffled around. To the north I caught a glimpse of a large, dark shape beside the hedge. It seemed to be creeping towards the animals a few feet at a time. One of the ponies whinnied again, and the silhouette disappeared into the hedge. Was it the Big Cat? I do not know, but it certainly scared the horses, as they say.

I spoke to the caretaker of the local school. Had she seen any economy-sized

felines prowling around the vicinity? No, but she'd heard the rumours.

Later in the day Iain went back to Cleadon Hills with a *Gazette* photographer for a photo shoot. Just for fun he dressed up in a pith helmet and khakis and carried a rather formidable looking hunting rifle which would undoubtedly have got him detained by the local constabulary had they caught him with it.

Looking every bit like Colonel Fawcett, Smithy posed for some magnificent snaps. The Cleadon ABC could now be either a Fun Thing or a Serious Thing, depending on your mind-set.

Shaggy Dog Story

The following evening the *Gazette* received a call from someone who believed she could solve the mystery. Tracey Stores, of Seaburn, told *Gazette* reporter Zoe Burn that she regularly walked her dog around Cleadon hills.

Her canine companion, Julius, is a Burmese Mountain Dog and has an imposing physique. Could Julius have been mistaken for a panther? Unlikely. He is multicoloured, long-haired and totally the wrong shape. Plus, I think it highly unlikely that his owner would take him walkies to Cleadon Hills at 0530hrs in the middle of January.

By January 16 the Cleadon ABC was no longer a Fun Thing. Iain Smith interviewed one chap who had stumbled upon the beast one morning whilst walking his dog.

"He was really shaken when he came back from the hills," said his wife. "He's vowed never to go back there again. He saw something which really scared him."

This sighting precipitated a mass boycott of Cleadon Hills by dog walkers, ramblers and bird-watchers. People genuinely became frightened for their pets, their children and themselves. By January 17, the whole subject had taken a far more serious tone. The police were getting concerned, and rumours started to circulate about a rabbit being found mutilated.

Try as I might I could not substantiate the story. At 10 o'clock Iain Smith telephoned me and asked if he could compare notes. Within two hours we were drinking tea and talking business. The *Gazette* devoted a whole page to the ABC on January 19, in which Iain put forward my theories and those of other pundits who felt they had something to offer.

I had suggested to Iain that he contact PC Eddie Bell from the Durham Constabulary. Eddie is a Durham Police wildlife officer, and has an above average knowledge of Big Cats. As Durham has been the scene of numerous ABC sightings, he is amply qualified to speak on the subject. According to Sergeant Bell, there had been similar sightings in Burnmoor, Consett, Plawsworth, Durham, Castle Eden, Weardale, Wingate and Barnard Castle. I had already suggested to Iain Smith that a rogue puma could have moved to Cleadon from any of these areas, and showed him several routes that the creature could have taken. Iain put my theory to Sergeant Bell, who said it certainly wasn't impossible.

By January 21 the fear factor had really taken hold. Iain reported that another local beauty spot had almost become "off-limits" to walkers, and the idea that the ABC was simply a large dog was firmly put to bed. Albert Burr, a resident of Hawthorn Avenue, spotted the beast several times whilst walking his two Rottweilers. Hard on his heels came Kim Denham, of Whiteleas, who came across the beast's footprints whilst out walking with a friend.

"There were about three or four of them in the fresh mud, and they were absolutely massive. You could see the pad prints and everything."

Another Cleadon resident cast doubt upon the zoological expertise of one of Her Majesty's constables after spotting the ABC meandering around the village.

"It was the size of a Great Dane, it had huge, rippling muscles and its mouth was filled with the most wicked-looking teeth I've ever seen. The policeman asked me if it couldn't have been next-door's tabby cat. He must be f*****g bonkers." Quite.

But by Wednesday 27 January, an altogether more taxonomically aware Sergeant Bell from Durham declared that he had information which led him to believe that several pumas had been released into the wild by a private collector in the 1970s. "I know that there is someone who released four animals into Weardale. They

are probably the source of the local big cats."

Just Give Me The Facts, Ma'am.

On February 20, things took a novel twist. I found another witness who had seen the ABC at close range, but incorporated some curious details to here account

At 8am On Sunday, 10 January Mrs. X had left her house in Laburnum Grove to purchase a newspaper. As she reached the bottom of her street and was about to turn right into Cleadon Lane, she suddenly decided against buying the paper, remembering that a friend of hers had one delivered by her son.

She was a bit concerned about her friend anyway, as she hadn't heard from her for a few days, and thought it best to give her a call. She would, she reasoned, have a cup of tea with her friend and read the newspaper whilst she was there. (I still haven't worked out whether Mrs. X's primary motive was to be a good neighbour or save herself 75p, but I'm happy to let the good Lord above settle that one.)

To get to her friend's house, Mrs. X had to walk along Cleadon Lane - this section of which is actually called Front Street - and turn right into Sunderland Road. She would then turn right again into Whitburn Road, where her friend lived. She didn't get that far. After turning into Sunderland Road, our witness was amazed to see a

huge, black "panther-like" creature standing on the pavement and looking across the road. Without hesitation it then "licked its lips and padded across the road to the other side. Then it suddenly disappeared."

The weather conditions in this case will be judged crucial by some. It was, says Mrs. X, "slightly foggy", and inevitably cynics will pounce on this as an explanation for what she told me next.

The panther, said Mrs. X. looked perfectly normal except for its legs. Even though she could see the rest of the creature with crystal clarity, its lower limbs were invisible. I asked Mrs. X if she had an explanation for this, and she replied, "No. It must have been the fog. That's all it could be, isn't it?" Mrs. X also said that the creature had "bright red eyes", and that these frightened her. When asked if the eyes were *glowing*, she said, "I'm not sure that "glowing" is the right word, but they were very bright".

And what about the sudden disappearance of the creature? Did it just vanish into the fog, perhaps?

"No. It was just like turning the TV off. It just sort of *went out* an instant." I carried this witness's story in the weekly column I write for the *Gazette*, entitled *Bizarre*.

I suggested that the creature may have been what cryptozoologist Jon Downes has called a "zoiform" animal; that is, one which has the general appearance of a normal creature but which is not "real" in the common sense of the word.

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Zooform animals sometimes appear with limbs missing, including, bizarrely, the head.

Zooforms are never caught, although they can, enigmatically, leave physical traces of their presence such as foot or paw prints. The "red, glowing eyes" are another common feature. Other unusual witness reports convinced me that the animal was indeed zooform in nature.

I told Iain Smith that the animal definitely would not be caught and that it would, in a few weeks, disappear. I also told Iain that he could quote me on that if he liked and if I was wrong then I'd put my hands up and take the flak.

Roll Up, Roll Up

By March 19 the hunt for the ABC had become a Fun Thing again. The newspapers were talking about "Big Cat Mania", and the South Shields Museum and Art Gallery staged an exhibition called "Claws" dedicated to both prehistoric and modern big cats.

Hordes of people from South Shields, Cleadon and the Boldons queued up to see the display, desperate to see close up what it was that they most certainly *didn't* want to see close up whilst walking Fido on Cleadon Hills.

The exhibition opened with a fun Day, and the entire world and its uncle wanted to get in on the act.

Whilst would-be big game hunters were organising themselves into expeditionary forces to go searching in "them thar hills", the RSPCA was giving out advice to the public, the Cat

Protection League was recruiting volunteers and a Northumbria Police Wildlife Officer was giving still others the benefit of his wisdom.

Of course, a Fun Day wouldn't be fun unless there was something there to traumatise the psyches of little children, and in this case it was a life-size, moving replica of a sabre-tooth tiger attempting to rip the innards out of a poor little baby mammoth.

The kids loved it, of course, and could now understand why both Daddy and Fido would have been very upset if they'd bumped into THIS mother-of-all felines out on the hills. Total hysteria was now the order of the day.

In April there was a momentary wobble of the enthusiasm indicator, and Iain Smith even speculated in the *Gazette* that the cat may have "gone south".

But then the public's collective juices started surging again when reports of other mystery big cats started coming in from Devon and Cornwall. Helicopters were whizzing around using the latest tracking gadgetry in an effort to find the beasts, and one or two Cleadon residents asked why we couldn't have the same degree of assistance.

By May, Big Cat Fever was showing no signs of slowing down. The by now legendary Sergeant Bell came to the museum to give a talk on the whole subject of mystery big cats. People were

so enthusiastic he had to stop back and give another one.

I attended the first lecture, and although found myself disagreeing with one or two points in the main it was solid stuff built on good research. Sergeant Bell mentioned a town in Canada which is "good puma country" and yet no one ever sees them. In fact, he told the audience, there are more sightings of Bigfoot recorded than those of pumas.

And then, without warning, the bubble seemed to burst. The ABC had gone.

There is no doubt in my mind that Cleadon Village did play host to an Alien Big Cat, and that it was almost certainly a puma or which had travelled from one of the creature's known hunting grounds to the south, or a melanistic leopard.

Almost as fascinating is the incredible effect that the beast's presence had on the minds of the general public. The cat acted like a social glue, rallying neighbours and stirring passions.

It was the wartime spirit all over again. The episode was also a fascinating study in Jungian psychology, for, love the Alien Big Cat or hate it, it presents us with a primal archetype; *man versus beast, and the triumph of man.*

I suspect we haven't seen the last of the Cleadon big cat. As soon as the next large paw print is found they'll be hanging out the bunting and dusting down the painted

wagons. And good luck to 'em, I say. It was great while it lasted.

IN THE COILS OF THE NAGA THE CFZ THAILAND EXPEDITION 2000

By

RICHARD FREEMAN



As Britain's only full time cryptozoologists we at the CFZ are frequently contacted by researchers from TV companies wanting to make monster related programmes. We are habitually visited by bright eyed young media things, who get incredibly excited and tell us that our ideas would make excellent documentaries. They then invariably, disappear for good. In the worst cases we find our ideas stolen and bastardised by people who know nothing about the subject.



Therefor when we were contacted by a company called Bang Productions in July of 2000 we did not hold any great expectations. We were visited by an outlandishly beautiful half Japanese girl called Manami Szymko who had come all the way from Hong Kong (where the company was based) to interview us as possible presenters on a Discovery

Channel project called "Mysteries of Asia". In particular she was interested in the Naga, a gigantic legendary snake reputed to inhabit the Mekong river. Other episodes will feature the yeti, ghost hunters in the Philippines, Indian holy men with healing powers, the supposed undersea city off Japan, and UFOs in China.

Manami interviewed me at length about the monster and filmed a screen test. She met all our exotic pets and then vanished and we never expected to hear from her again. That was in July 2000. Imagine then, gentle reader, your humble narrator's surprise when a young lady called Sandra Egart from the afore mentioned company in early October asking if I could join them in Thailand in a handful of days time.

The next few days were a blur of injections, and procurement of tropical accoutrements. Then all of a sudden I was thousands of feet over Asia on my way to "Boy's Own" (the 1920s comic not, the limp wristed "boy" band) style adventures.

It may be prudent at this point to give background on the naga its self. Nagas are gigantic snakes found in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. They bare an erectile crest upon the head like that of a cockatoo but consisting of scales. The naga holds this aloft when angry rather like a cobra opens its hood. According to Buddhist scriptures the naga can kill in four ways. Firstly by biting and injecting its venom. Secondly by spitting like certain species of cobra. In this case the venom has a paralysing effect causing the victim to become as stiff as a statue in death. Thirdly by constriction with its According to legend nagas have immense intelligence and magickal power. They could transform themselves into humans and walk unnoticed in the world of men. It was believed they inhabited grand underwater palaces rather like the dragons of China. Unfortunately for folklorists of the Michael Meurger ilk the naga is not satisfied with being a legend and still rears its scaly head today.

The flight from England via Amsterdam took an uncomfortable ten hours but finally I arrived in Bangkok

I was met at the airport by Sandra the production assistant who had contacted me earlier and Peter Daniel the producer. I was surprised at their youth, having expected middle-aged people. Sandra, a former model, was of a particularly striking beauty.

I had been told that due to budget restrictions we were staying in a cheap hotel. "Cheap hotel" seems to have a different meaning in Thailand. The Amari Atrium in which we stayed whilst in Bangkok was by far the finest hotel I have ever had the pleasure of patronising. This begs the

question of what an expensive hotel would be like.

Presently we were joined by the other members of our crew. The researcher and interpreter Athihan Srivetbodee or "Bob" for short who also worked for a charity protecting captive elephants. The camera man was Derek Williams who in a thirty year career had covered just about every event of importance in Indo-China. His mother has been badgering him to write his autobiography for years. I for one would love to read it. He was ably assisted by his soundman, Somyot Pisapark who had accompanied him on numerous previous adventures. Somyot was a dedicated man. Halfway through our filming schedule he was told his wife had developed throat cancer but he continued all the same.

Bangkok is a strange city. It bares an uncanny resemblance to Birmingham. It even has an office block shaped like Birmingham's famous Rotunda. Gaining planning permission in Bangkok is as easy as fancying Kim Director. So buildings spring up like fungi. So fast do they get built that often times some small things like foundations or strengthening rods are forgotten and the building is abandoned. Unlike Birmingham however one often comes across an elephant wandering nonchalantly down the street or rooting through a bin outside a bakery!

Later that evening I was shown some film of the giant Mekong catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*) This animal is the largest (in terms of bulk) freshwater fish in the world and has been mooted as an explanation for the naga. The sequence showed four men catching an eight foot specimen. The silvery grey fish is of

massive bulk and has bizarrely situated eyes, very low on the head. The men manually stimulated the fish's cloaca to collect its milt to use in captive breeding programmes. Strange to think I had travelled all the way to Thailand to watch film of a fish being masturbated!

The day after my arrival we visited Samutprakarn crocodile farm, home to the largest crocodile in captivity a 20 foot indo-pacific, Siamese cross named Yai. Yai in Thai means *big*, what a lot of thought went into his naming! Yai was sharing a network of pools with around 100 other crocodiles. Conveniently for us he was in a small shallow pool that allowed me to walk up and down his entire length and confirm his size.

The keepers swore that Yai was the largest crocodile on the farm, but out in the main lake I saw a number that appeared to be several feet longer. Two specimens looked around 23 feet and a huge individual appeared to be around 25 feet. This latter giant stayed in the centre of the large pool and would not be tempted closer to the bank. He showed only the end of his huge jaws and a portion of his scuted, tree-trunk like tail. Ergo an accurate measurement could not be made. I had a theory that the Mekong monster could be a large (30 foot +) indo-pacific crocodile (*C. porosus*). I latter abandoned that idea after hearing eye-witness accounts but this gave me a chance to view my favourite creatures closer up than ever.

ever. The crew had me talk about crocs and the titanic sizes they can reach whilst filming me in front of the pool. Then the gates were opened and I was presented with several buckets of chicken carcasses. "You lean through and feed them . We'll film you from over here" they said

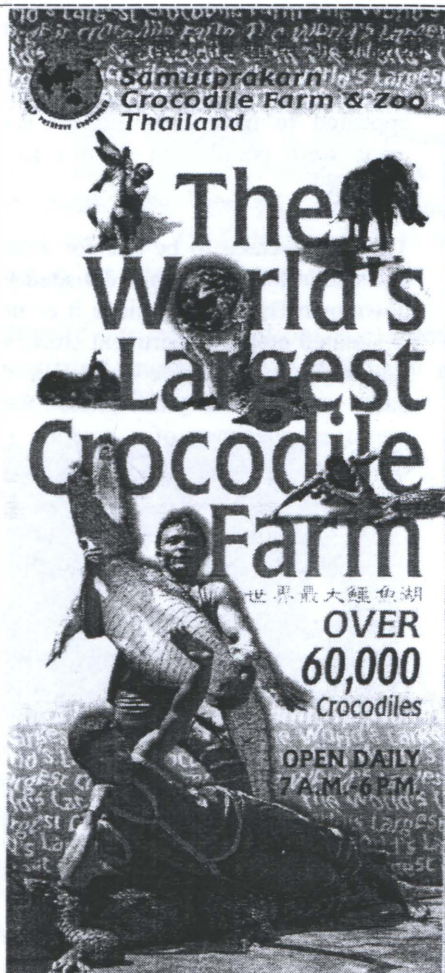


Yai (on left) – the world's largest captive crocodile?

My days as a zookeeper taught me that captive crocodiles are much more interested in eating the food a keeper presents them with than the keeper himself. Yai was not hungry but several of his comrades came whizzing in like Polaris missiles with bear traps attached to them. I must admit to enjoying feeding them immensely and became nostalgic for my years as a zoo keeper.

Samutprakarn would not past muster for a zoo in the west. Its promotional material pushes the conservation angle but by cross breeding (the Indo-pacific's huge size and

fast growth with the Siamese's less aggressive nature being the "ideal mix" for skin farming) the gene pools both species are being diluted. The Siamese crocodile (*C. siamensis*) was until recently believed to be extinct in the wild but thankfully they seemed to have survived unscathed in Cambodia where they were rediscovered only this year!



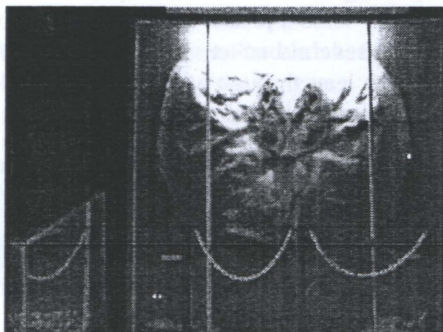
Elsewhere at Samutprakarn were tigers attached to four foot chains that visitors could be photographed with. The docile creatures appeared to have been doped. Baby orang-utans were paraded in dresses for the same purposes.

This day seemed to be one for appalling zoos because in the afternoon we visited Pata zoo in downtown Bangkok. Believe it or not this zoo is situated atop a department store. One of the floors houses a reptile collection that is not badly maintained. Also here they had a preserved specimen of a creature I had only ever read about in Karl Shuker's "*Lost Ark*", the giant freshwater stingray (*Himantura chaophraya*). Only discovered in 1987 this fish is a monster in every sense of the word.

The nearest description of this piscine titan I can give is an organic flying saucer! Greeny grey in colour its flattened body disc measures some seven feet by six and a half feet, big enough to cover a double bed. Its eyes were tiny like those of the Mekong catfish with whom it shares its habitat. These bottom feeders must rely on touch, scent and electro-reception in the Mekong's muddy waters.

On the roof of the building the mammals and birds are kept, in truly appalling conditions. I am an ardent supporter of responsible zoos with good breeding programmes. They are vital to save many endangered species. But slapdash holes like Pata zoo belong in the dark ages. Here gorillas, tigers, leopards, orang-utans, and pigmy hippos were kept in enclosures the size of the average living room. Worst were the bears. Three sun bears and an Asian black bear in a bare concrete enclosure with no den or

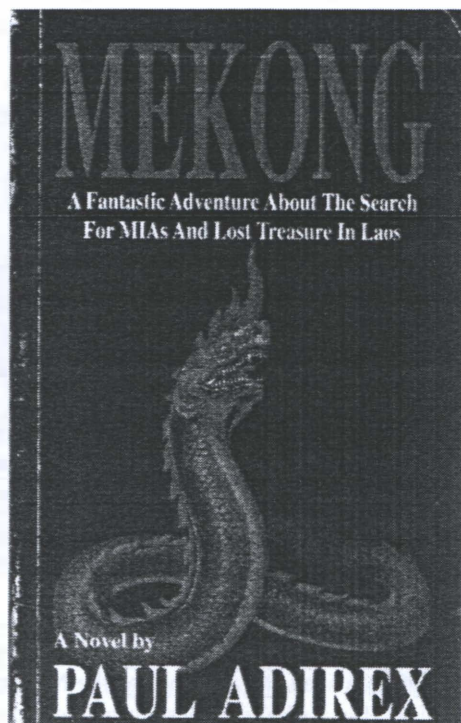
climbing facilities. It could not have been more than ten feet square.



The Mekong Giant Stingray

A woman was selling cakes to feed to them so their existence was nothing more than sleeping and begging. Ironically the zoo had some rare animals hardly ever seen in British zoos such as umbrella birds, Burmese ferret badgers, and yellow martins. These were totally wasted as exhibits in such a vile excuse for a zoo. We were meant to be interviewing the director of Pata zoo who had taken some film of an alleged naga swimming in the Mekong. However he had fallen over and banged his head. He was in critical condition in hospital at the time. It seems karma really works! Instead we talked to a Dr Apicsart who was a fish expert not connected to the zoo. Dr Apicsart had spent many years on board Japanese trawlers studying rare fish often from the deep seas. He was sceptical about the naga believing witnesses had seen

shoaling fish. As I was to later find out this explanation did not stand up to scrutiny.



The following day we left Bangkok and flew north to Udon Thani in the north of the country that would be our base of operations for the rest of the expedition. We were met at the airport by the other main player in the adventure Pongpol Adireksarn better known in the west under his pen name Paul Adirex. A best selling author both in east and west he specialises in action thrillers and has penned four best sellers one of which "Mekong" features nagas in which he firmly believes.

As well as this Pongpol is the campaign manager of the opposition party in Thailand. Charming and witty he was a joy to work with. When I asked him if his politics were left or right he answered... *"In Thai politics there is no left or right just right and wrong!"*

In Udon Thani we checked into our hotel and were met by a some of Pongpol's friends and assistants including a friendly and enthusiastic young man called Pracha Manakarn or "Pang" to his friends. Pang owned a pub in Udon Thani and wanted to become a tourist guide. I never did find out exactly what he did for Pongpol but he proved to be an excellent companion and addition to the team.

That evening a banquet in Pongpol's honour was held at a local restaurant. He seemed to be a very well liked man (unlike most western politicians) and a local celebrity. It was here that I ate Mekong catfish soup. I'm not a great lover of fish (as food that is) but the Mekong catfish had some of the most delicious flesh I have ever eaten. If you can imagine the most succulent melt in the mouth fish mixed with Parma violets you might get some idea. The following day we drove to a statue garden. Here gigantic statues some 150 feet or more tall stand surrounded by jungle.

One could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled upon a lost city of the H.Rider-Haggard kind but the statues are only about 20 years old.

They depicted mainly religious characters. Thailand is a Buddhist country but their Buddhism is singular in that it has been heavily

influenced by Hinduism. Hence alongside sculptures of the Lord Buddha gods such as Kali, Ganeesh, and Hanuman are found. This is an important factor that I shall return to later.

There were several massive statues of nagas including the multi-headed naga king shading Buddha as he meditates.

As well as the naga other Thai monsters were present. The garuda is a creature half bird half man, who is said to bring the rains on his wings. There is also a magickal golden lion. All three live together in a mystic jungle. So we have a giant water serpent, a bird man, and a mystery big cat in the same country. Sound familiar?

It seems there are universal templates for monsters. One could just as easily be talking about Morgawr, Owlman, and the Beast of Bodmin.

During the summer of 1966 a peasant dug up some huge eggs close to the Lan Xang hotel in Vientiane, the capitol of Laos. Believing them to be naga eggs he took them to General Kong Lee, the commander of the Neutralist army. Later the naga appeared in the peasant's dreams warning that if the eggs were not returned it would flood the Mekong river. The naga also wanted ceremonies of atonement to be performed. The peasant warned the general who in turn warned the Prince, Souvana Phouma. The prince and his right wing generals ignored Kong Lee and would not let him perform the rituals. Duly the Mekong flooded. No one seems to know what became of the general or the eggs.

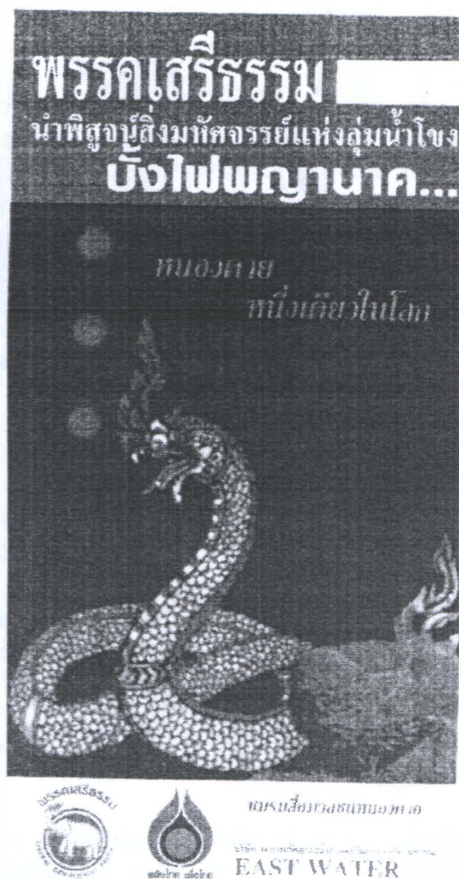
Just across the river from where these eggs were allegedly found is the town of Nongkhai. Here we spoke to Malinee Phisaphan an old lady who had seen a naga five years earlier. Malinee ran an antique stamp shop and a cyber café!

She was highly intelligent and read, wrote, and spoke perfect English. She and a friend had been riding through town on a bus when they passed by a bridge.

Both of them saw a huge black snake in the water beneath the bridge. Malinee described it as around seventeen feet long and as thick about as a football (that is an English football). It could have been a large python but it would have had to have been melanistic. The next day was an important one. The naga mystery has been mixed up with several other mysteries in it's complicated folklore. One of these is the naga fireballs.

On October 13th every year balls of red light are seen shooting out of the Mekong river. Locals believe these to be the breath of the naga and to herald the end of the rainy season. Huge crowds are drawn to celebrate and view the phenomena from the banks of the Mekong river.

The Fortean in me noted the balls of blue light associated with giant snakes in the Amazon and believed to be their bioluminescent eyes. I also thought of earth lights often reported over water. Perhaps two Fortean phenomena were occurring here side by side.



Publicity brochure for the Naga Festival

In the daytime before the nocturnal lights appear a huge parade was run. This included hundreds of people in traditional dress, bands, and floats holding images of the naga. It ended with a temple made

entirely from bamboo leaves being floated upon the river.

I am a zoologist but I am also a pagan, a practising magician, and a believer in magick. I had prepared my own offering for the naga that I had brought all the way from England. It consisted of a piece of jade (oriental dragons are fond of jade according to legend) incense, and a resin statue of a dragon.

I was planning to float this down the river as an offering. Unfortunately I had not realised the steepness of the bank or the thickness of the crowd that night and had to postpone my offering's launch.

So I found myself surrounded by 100,000 screaming Thais shining spotlights and laser pointers on the water and letting off fireworks. Traditional long boats illuminated with candles and lamps passed by as we waited for the phenomena to begin. Suddenly a shout went up, a fireball had been spotted. Shortly after I saw a red light spring upwards from the opposite bank then fade away. Soon more followed firstly in the singular the in twos, threes, and fours. Swiftly something dawned upon me, if this were a natural phenomena it would be occurring from the entire width of the river. All the lights were springing up from the far bank of the Mekong, I.E the Laotian side. Also they were all coming from areas where lamps were visible and presumably people were present. They also look very orchestrated. The fabled naga fireballs seemed to be nothing more than fireworks, the relatively noiseless kind that fade away rather than exploding, much like maritime distress flares. I mentioned this to some of my Thai companions who said they couldn't

possibly be fireworks because they were silent and faded rather than exploding!

black snake would appear and rear up striking at them.

You have doubtless heard of the Loch Ness "hoodoo", the ill luck that befalls those trying to photograph the monster. Cameras jam or are forgotten, or something else happens at the crucial moment the hamper the picture. Well I suffered from Mekong hoodoo. Earlier that day I had checked the charge on the batteries of my video camera. They said I had over an hour of film left. When I tried to film the festival the camera gave out halfway through the pre-fireball parade (but if you're here who is grooming the nagas ready for the naga parade?). Hence I had to rely on a stills camera.



Part of the new temple at
Phon Pisai

A couple of days later as I tried to rewind that the back opened and all the film spooled out. I wouldn't read too much into this as I am the most cack handed and incompetent technophobe you are ever likely to meet. So the fireballs bit the dust. I was satisfied that the Laotians were having a good chuckle at their friends across the river. But there were other riddles waiting for my attention.

Workmen, monks, and abbot all saw it. It was very thick but they could not estimate the length as the creature never revealed its whole body but kept most of its coils in the building. Final an offering was given to the monster and it disappeared overnight.

The next day we visited the village of Phon Pisai where Pongpol interviewed a Buddhist abbot (who bore an uncanny resemblance to the late Brian Glover) and his monks about a strange naga encounter. The temple was the most spectacular building in the village, adorned with dragons and nagas. Eight years ago there was an old temple where the fine new one stands. The ancient, tumbledown erection had become unsightly and dangerous so it was decided to pull it down and build a new one. But whenever work men approached a huge

Back in Nong Khai we interviewed a Dr Manus. He had a theory on the fireballs. According to him on October the 13th the Earth is in such an alignment with the Sun that the solar waves are at a certain length that in some way effects gas molecules in the river and energises them into fireballs. He had some gizmo for reading gaseous emissions and showed us that around the 13th and a couple of days either side the emissions rose. I'm no physicist but all this sounded a little dodgy to me. As it

turned out Dr Manus was no physicist either, he was a paediatrician! He gave me the address of his website but I lost it on my way home and have not been able to locate his site on the net. If any readers have better look please let me know.

The following day we were back in Phon Pisai to interview another witness. Officer Suphat is chief of police in Phon Pisai. Three years ago he and a group of thirty people had been walking on some cliffs overlooking the Mekong.

They had seen what at first they believed to be flotsam floating along in the river. As it drew closer they became aware that it was moving against the current.

Looking down they saw a gigantic black snake swimming with a horizontal flexation (indicative of a fish, amphibian, or reptile).

I asked Officer Suphat how long the monster was, his answer staggered me, seventy metres! I double checked thinking there had been a mistranslation but he clarified seventy metres or two hundred and thirty feet. A monster of truly Toho studios dimensions.

The crowd watched as the naga swam by then were overcome by fear and fled. He later asked a Buddhist monk about his sighting. The holy man confirmed what he had seen was a naga. He explained that some years ago a statue of Buddha was being transported by boat across the river. The boat capsized and the statue fell to

the river bed. Since then nagas have come to protect it.

The officer's monster seems excessively long. I think what he may have seen were several nagas swimming in line, perhaps males in pursuit of a female much as the "Migo" footage from New Britain shows two crocodiles swimming in single file. Alternatively it could have been a long wake that made an already huge serpent seem even longer.



Officer Suphat

Another enigma awaited me in Phon Pisai, one that excited me as a zoologist. The bones of an actual naga were said to be kept as holy relics in the village! A strange story was attached to them. Their current owner had a dream in which he was visited by a naga. The serpent told him to cross the bridge into Laos where he would meet a man who owned naga bones. He was told to buy the bones. Duly the man crossed the bridge the next day and met the bone owner. But the Laotian refused to sell the bones and the Thai returned empty handed. Next night the naga came to his dreams again

and told the man to return and ask the Laotian if he would sell half the naga bones. Once more the bone's owner refused and the man came home with nothing. One final time the serpent entered the man's sleeping mind and told him to try once more and that the Laotian would relent. The man crossed the bridge a third time and indeed the other conceded and sold him the bones.



Unfortunately NOT the tooth of a naga

This aside I was excited at the prospect of laying my hands on real physical evidence of the creature. We were told that the owner did not want to be filmed and would not let us take the bones away for DNA analysis as I had wanted. However we were allowed to film and touch them. I was confident about being able to identify snake bones and hoped we had stumbled across evidence of a titanic new species. The bones were brought to the police station and kept under lock and key until we arrive. They were brought out in a silver chalice. We waited with baited breath as the lid was

removed to reveal... a sodding elephant's tooth! Quite how, in a country so jam-packed with pachyderms anyone could mistake an elephant's tooth for anything else is beyond your humble narrator. Another mystery shot down in flames.

My final full day in Thailand turned out to be the most exciting and fruitful. We drove for hours north along dirt tracks in the jungle then trekked on foot to an extremely remote village in the forested hills. I don't even know if this place has a name, I never found out. As Randi from "It Ain't Half Hot Mum" said, it's the back of beyond and then some. Our witness was a sprightly old man of about seventy called Mr Pimpa.



Mr Pimpa

He had a frighteningly close encounter with a naga in some little known caves in the area. After filming and interviewing Mr Pimpa he offered to take us underground to the naga's lair. We were

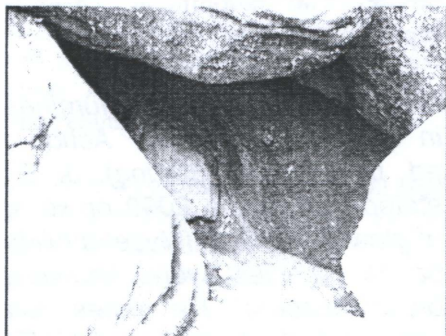
led to a small cave mouth in a hillside hidden by the verdant morass.

It did not look like much but Mr Pimpa told us that it led to a network of caves that stretched for some ten miles beneath the hills and connected with the Mekong. Like a guardian a strangely flattened and cryptically coloured spider four inches across lurked on the lichen at the cave mouth.

The camera crew filmed the entrance and Peter the producer followed Mr Pimpa, Pang, and myself into the first cave. Roughly fifteen feet square and four feet high it did not look like much but by flickering candle light our aged guide showed us a tiny triangular tunnel in one corner. Peter with his expensive hand held camera went no further and I left my bulky camera behind too as Pang and I followed Mr Pimpa.

The tunnel was half filled with water and so low one had to crouch. It led on for some forty feet into the main net work. It was as if we had entered the fevered mind of Clark Ashton Smith. These caves were by far the strangest and most alien place I have ever been in. Imagine a hybrid of the labyrinth of Sogo in "Barbarella" and the "Caves of Androzani" from the eponymous Dr Who adventure. Now shrink them. None of this honeycomb was more than four feet high. The dank, unwholesome passages were usually half that wide. Occasionally they widened out into spaces of fifteen feet. These were peopled with unearthly rock formations

like giant coffins or Greek pillars. All were festooned with offerings of jasmine wreaths in honour of the great serpent.



Mouth of the Naga Cave

On several occasions we had to cross icy subterranean rivers and navigate razor sharp stalagmites that hung like guillotines from the ceiling. When not crouched we were on all fours or slithering like worms on our bellies through the primal slime. No bats hung from the ceiling but I observed what looked like tiny glowing strings of pearls hanging from the cave ceiling. These were drops of luminous saliva suspended on strands of silk by carnivorous midge lava like ghoulish fishing rods. I have only heard

About these from caves in New Zealand and never else were. Unfortunately I was not carrying a specimen jar (a near physical impossibility down there) so I could not collect any. Does anyone out there have any idea if this is a new species?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Upon Richard's return we e-mailed the Cryptozoology discussion list on the Internet for any more information about these luminous midge larvae. The indomitable Chad Arment replied:

In a chapter on insect bioluminescence in Bioluminescence in Action (1978, ed. by Peter J. Herring), J. E. Lloyd stated that of the 2000 or so species of glow-worm flies (Mycetophilidae), 10 or 11 species were known to be bioluminescent. He notes luminous species have been found in Sweden, Japan, Australia, North Carolina, New Guinea, New Zealand (A. luminosa, that you mentioned), and possibly Fiji. Doesn't mention anything from Thailand, but this book was published 22 years ago, so don't know if anything has come up since then. You might have to talk to a specialist; sounds interesting.

Adios.
Chad

We travelled for about a mile until we came to the place Mr Pimpa had seen the monster some ten years ago. It was an elongate tubular cave. The old man had been exploring by candle light when he had turned into this cave and come across a giant snake. Its head was in the shadows but the visible portion of its body was sixty feet long. Mr Pimpa pressed himself back against the wall in terror as the giant reptile crawled by at an agonisingly slow pace. Its

scales were black with a glossy green sheen and it was around two and a half to three feet thick. Finally it disappeared along the passage and Mr Pimpa collapsed gasping in relief. In the dark his had fell against a tiny semi-precious stone which he pocketed. Scrambling back out of the cave system he returned to the village and told his weird tale. He later had the stone mounted onto a serpent shaped ring which he showed to us. He believed that despite the fear he felt at the time the naga brought him luck. Prior to his adventure he was a poor man who could hardly afford to feed his family. After it he inherited some land and became a successful farmer. The caves were now considered sacred to the villagers.

Fortunately the resourceful Pang had a tiny pocket camera and took shots of me in the Naga cave. He is posting them on to me shortly.

He led us back along a different set of passages and I regretted not having brought a ball of twine. Suddenly daylight streamed in and I looked up to see a vertical shaft which was ten feet high with perpendicular slime covered walls. Mr Pimpa shot up it like a monkey but a portly clumsy cryptozoologist is not the most agile of creatures.

After several attempts I was forced to climb up poor Pang like a living ladder and be dragged the rest of the way by our guide. We then pulled up trampled Pang and trekked back off through the jungle to our crew.

I was impressed by Mr Pimpa's testimony. He had nothing to gain from lying to us and was not paid for his story and seemed genuinely surprised that people from the outside world were interested. He was a very nice man who went out of his way to be helpful.

That night back in the hotel I was shown the film taken by the director of Pata zoo of the supposed naga swimming in the Mekong. Most film of cryptids is bad, fuzzy, pixelated, out of focus, but this took the biscuit. It was a wobbly badly filmed log being bobbed up and down by the current. Nothing more, nothing less.

We had a goodbye drink at Pang's pub "*Made in Udon Thani*". It's a great place with live bands beautiful bar maids, good food, and good beer. If your ever in Udon Thani be sure to check it out and give Pang my regards.

The next day we flew back to Bangkok and awaited our transport home. Bob, Derek, and Somyot returned to there abodes in Thailand. Peter, Sandra, (who live in Hong Kong) and I waited for our planes. We had a drink with an old friend of Peter's Mike Dyer, a computer programmer who married a beautiful Thai girl and lives in the country full time.

Sandra and Peter's flight was several hours before mine so Mike kindly stayed and downed several pitchers of beer with me whilst I waited for mine. He told me of the idyllic life he had led, living in a shack on a beach in southern Thailand with a

lovely Thai girl selling tee-shirts to tourists, until they built a hotel over his shack. At the moment his wife is very ill with a respiratory disease caught from bat guano in some caves. My best wishes go out to both her and Somyot's wife.

I slept most of the flight back, and returned to cold, rain, and floods. After the laid back attitude of Thailand it was as if a tidal wave of woe had broken over my head. But forgetting my moanings for a moment what conclusions did I come to?

Firstly the fireballs seem to be man made, possibly in order to attract custom to the area (stall holders really cleaned up on the 13th). Secondly the naga bones were elephant teeth. Thirdly the naga film was a floating log in the Frank Searle mould. But one mystery remains unbowed, the naga itself. The witnesses seem to fall into two categories, those who saw something in the river and those who saw something on land. Both however have mystic overtones e.g serpents guarding temples and statures or bringing good look.

Do you remember me telling you about the Hindu influence on Thai Buddhism? Well this I think is the key. Nagas originated in Indian legend and were brought down into Indo-China. I think all of the mystical elements of the original legendary naga have been grafted onto a real animal, something that has always inhabited the Mekong. But what is it?

There were once a group of snakes that did reach immense sizes. These were the *Madtsoids*, They first evolved in the Cretaceous

and were found world wide. At first believed to be giant *Boids* it is now known that they were a primitive basal group of snakes. These were highly successful for such archaic beasts and flourished in some cases, such as the Australian *Wonambi* until the end of the Pleistocene epoch only ten thousand years ago. Some species dwarf today's anaconda. A vertebra from South America indicates a sixty foot snake as thick about as an oil drum. Primarily aquatic it is believed they were live bearers.

Reports from all over the tropics suggest that some species may have survived to the present day. As well as great size all these monsters snakes seem to have strange ornamentation on the head. The lau of the swamps of Sudan is said to have facial tentacles. The mano tauro or sucuriju gigante of the Amazon is believed to have horns, and Indo-China's naga has a crest. Horns are not unknown on snakes the rhinoceros viper of Africa and the horned viper of the middle east are just two. The horns are actually modified scales. *Madtsoids* killed their prey by constriction with huge muscular coils so what of the nagas venom. Having both constriction and venom would be evolutionary overkill. As far as we know no *Madtsoids* were venomous. Perhaps this is a facet of folklore like the harmless salamanders of Europe which were supposed to be deadly poisonous.

So there you have it, my theory on the naga and giant snakes worldwide.

It is only a theory and will remain so until a well financed expedition with a lot of time makes a concerted effort to find a specimen. One last thing about these giant snakes, it makes you wonder about all the medieval

legends of giant snakes in Britain, such as the Lampton worm and the Linton worm etc. Could there once have been a temperate hibernating species in Europe? Nah that's just too fantastic.....isn't it?

THE BIG FISH PROJECT

Editor's note:

In Issue 22 we launched our "Big Fish Project" which is an attempt to produce a socio-cultural correlation between the legends of lake monsters across the world and the similar legends of "Big Fish" in much smaller bodies of water. Soon after publication we received the following letter from our friend Andreas Trottmann in Switzerland:

Dear Jon Downes,

I refer to your fascinating "CFZ Big Fish Project" (as presented in the most recent "Animals & Men" magazine.

There are various legends (such as being a lake- or river-monster as well as being a man-eater etc) attached to the impressive and elusive wels. Also there are highly disputable and contradictory reports concerning its size.

Several years ago, I became intrigued by a number of sighting reports of strange creatures (reported as lake-monsters in the newspapers) in the lake on which shores I live.

After contacting witnesses, local archives and fishermen and even taking pictures of these creatures, I was able to identify them as wels. I published my respective research results in my trilogy on Swiss lake-monster traditions.

As an addition to your "*Big Fish Project*" archives and researches please find herewith a copy of this article.

Looking very much forward to your news, I remain.....

Andreas Trottmann

LAKE MONSTERS IN SWITZERLAND?

by

Andreas Trottmann

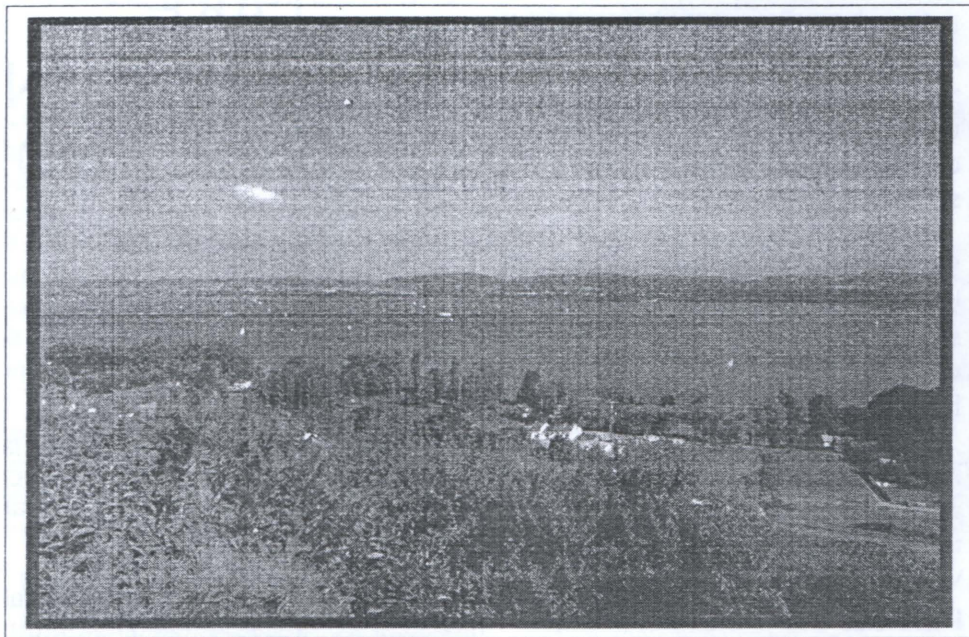
I would like to comment briefly on the relationship between big fish and lake monsters with the story of possible, recent sightings of such creatures in a Swiss lake.

Let us therefore get acquainted with the Lac de Morat and its presumed "lake-monsters". This lake is well known to me, as I live in the wine village of Vallamand-Dessous, just about a hundred metres from its shore.

The quite shallow Murtensee / Lac de Morat has a surface of 23 square kilometres and a main depth of 46 metres. The lake is connected by the canals of the Broye, respectively of the Zihl, to the larger Lac de Neuchâtel (surface of 217,9 square km, main depth 153 m) and the Bielersee (Lac de Bienne) (surface of 39.8 square kilometres, main depth 74 metres). 1 square kilometre = 0.38 square mile.

Around its shore are located several small villages, as well as the beautiful medieval towns of Murten (Morat) and Avenches (one of the most important Roman sites in

We take great pleasure, therefore in printing his article in full:



Murtensee/ Lac de Morat

Switzerland). The locals are mostly bilingual (French /Swiss German) and the region is famous for its excellent white and rosé wines.

In August, 1992 two curious letters to the editor were published in the *Berner Zeitung*, one of the main newspapers of Bern (the federal capital of Switzerland). The first letter (with the heading "Four submarines submerge as under command") mentions a recent binocular assisted observation of four long, very dark

blue, aquatic objects, swimming in unison from west to east in the Murtensee. The size of this or these "lake monster(s)" (as named in the article) was estimated at 4.5 to 5.5 metres. The witness was able to calibrate the size with the help of a nearby anchored boat.

In response to this article, another reader replied a few days later. He agreed, admitting to have observed "many hundred times" similar objects and unexplained wake motions in the

lake, especially on warm summer evenings. He also indicated his sighting locations (just on the right of the above photograph), which are visible from his house in Vallamand-Dessus.

As a keen cryptozoologist, I contacted both witnesses for further details.

The first witness, Max Mössinger, (an architect, therefore certainly able to estimate distances and sizes) provided me with following further information:

- He stated firmly that each of the four bodies measured between 4.5 and 5.5 metres
- All four bodies swam in a single line and disappeared one by one (1, 2, 3 and 4)
- Duration of the sighting about 5 minutes
- Calm waters
- No body details were visible (such as flippers, fins, heads etc.)

The second witness, Hansruedi Lauper, gave me the following clues:

- Normally seen only on warm summer evenings between 5.00 pm and 8.00 pm
- Duration of sightings about 5 minutes
- Always in very shallow waters (about 10 metres depth)
- No body details were visible (such as flippers, fins, heads etc.)

- Single and multiple bodies were seen

He kindly proposed, that as soon as the strange sightings started again, he would contact me to join him (at the time, I lived an hours' drive away).

And indeed, the next summer, I received his call and off I went with some camera equipment.

From his house, we had a superb view of the estuary of the River Broye (about 400 metres distant). After some time, this area started to produce strange and heavy wake motions and the sunbeams reflected on some large moving bodies. It seemed, that they were basking and rolling in the shallow and warm waters.

I took the following photograph with a 500mm telephoto lens.



Strange waves
and bodies
Murtensee /Lac de Morat

ANIMALS & MEN # 23

Several boats were in the vicinity, but either drifting or at anchor. Except for the photographed motions, the water was very calm in this particular lake area.

Doesn't this photograph look quite similar to some reported sightings of lakes with a lake monster tradition? Possible humps and unexplained water motions are clearly visible!

A work colleague of my wife mentioned also, that once when sunbathing in her large, inflatable boat, it received suddenly a heavy blow from beneath, suggesting a large body swimming under the boat. Obviously, she was rather scared by this experience.

Now, by what kind of aquatic creature(s) could these sightings be explained?

As suggested in the two letters to the editor, these sightings were most probably not caused by any unknown "lake-monsters" but by some of the huge, legendary wels / catfishes (*Silurus glanis*) inhabiting the lake.

Therefore, I started to make further inquiries into the wels population of the Lac de Morat and came in contact with several fishermen, experts in the catch of wels. They confirmed that, indeed this lake, as well as the connected Bielersee / Lac de Bienne contain an important wels population. Often specimens of 2 metres and 50-60 kilograms were and are still caught. Through the archives of the local newspapers, I located several articles on

such catches (often with the heading: "A lake-monster was caught.....")

Also I obtained from a private source an interesting photograph (below). This wels was caught in wintertime. Strangely enough, the fish was stuck between the lake bottom and the surface ice.



Impressive catch of a 95 kg catfish in the Murtensee /Lac de Morat

One evening in the summer of 1995, my attention was drawn to some people looking with great interest into our village fountain.

And indeed, a very impressive wels just caught by a fisherman, measuring 2 metres and weighing 55 kg laid peacefully in the fresh waters of the fountain (it occupied the whole available space). In spite of the large amount of body fat, the cook from the local fish restaurant managed to prepare 70 meals out of it.

The largest accurately measured wels of which there is reliable evidence was a 3 metre female caught in the Danube in Rumania (now preserved in the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle of Paris). But there are several reports, especially from Eastern Europe and Russia, of much larger specimens (up to 4.6 metres and 300 kilograms weight).

For further information, please refer to the "Guinness book of Animal Facts & Feats" by Gerald L. Wood.

The strange "lake-monster" reports in the Lac de Morat are therefore explained by the behaviour of some of the ugly but fascinating wels.

Are they indeed? Because one intriguing point remains to be solved: why the author of the first "letter to the editor" stated firmly that each of the visible bodies was estimated to be between 4.5 and 5.5 metres long.

Are large, unidentified, aquatic creatures enjoying the waters of this peaceful lake? I keep an open eye and let you know!

WHAT'S AFOOT?

By Richard Freeman

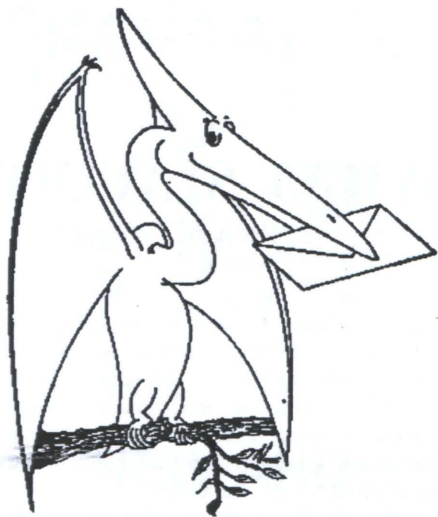
Scant days after my return from the green hell of Indo-China I embarked on what was to be an even more testing and rigorous expedition. I braved the British weather and the inadequacies of our railways to travel to South Shields. Both Jon and myself had been kindly invited to do a lecture tour in the area by our old friend Mike Hallowell.

Mike had planned a small convention for the Halloween period revolving around several pubs. Unfortunately he had not counted on this period seeing the most violent storms and floods the country had experienced for 300 years!

It took me ten hours to get to Thailand, it took eleven to get to Newcastle. We arrived a day and a half late after reroots through Wales, cancellations, and unexpected changes, to discover Jon had left his briefcase (containing medicine) on the train. We had no time to panic as we were already late for the first gig, at which we were to meet the mayor.

On the first night I lectured on dragons and Jon on animal mutilations. My leaden pall was lifted by the arrival of the exceptionally lovely Dr Gail Nina Anderson from Newcastle University who could lift the darkest of spirits from the black uterus of despair.

On subsequent nights we talked on the Chupacabra and general Forteana. Mike was good enough to show us Marsden Grotto and the sight of his sea serpent encounter.



LETTERS TO YER EDITOR

The Editor and his band of merry men welcome an exchange of correspondence on any subject of interest to readers of this magazine. We reserve the right to edit letters and would like to stress that opinions voiced are those of the individual correspondent rather than being necessarily those of the editorial team or the Centre for Fortean Zoology. Every attempt is made not to infringe anyone's moral rights or copyright, and we apologise if we have unwittingly done so.

OWLMEN AGAIN

Jon,

Three people in my town have seen the thing you call "owlman." I call it the same thing, and almost passed out when I saw that someone else has seen it. I live near the Grand river, between Bristol and Farmington, OH.

They saw it in the 60s and 70s. it was about three to four feet tall, and had glowing yellow eyes. it crossed the narrow dirt road in front of them, stopped for a second, and looked in at two of them.

The third sighting was in about 1960, when an 8 year old boy was riding his bicycle home in the same area. If I picture what they described as "*it had the body of a monkey and the face of an owl,*" I'm sure I saw it somewhere before, but I can't place it. what else can you tell me, please? Anything. I've been scared for years and I just want to know what that thing is. thank you - please respond. please.

Mike, Ohio
Via e-mail

ANIMALS & MEN

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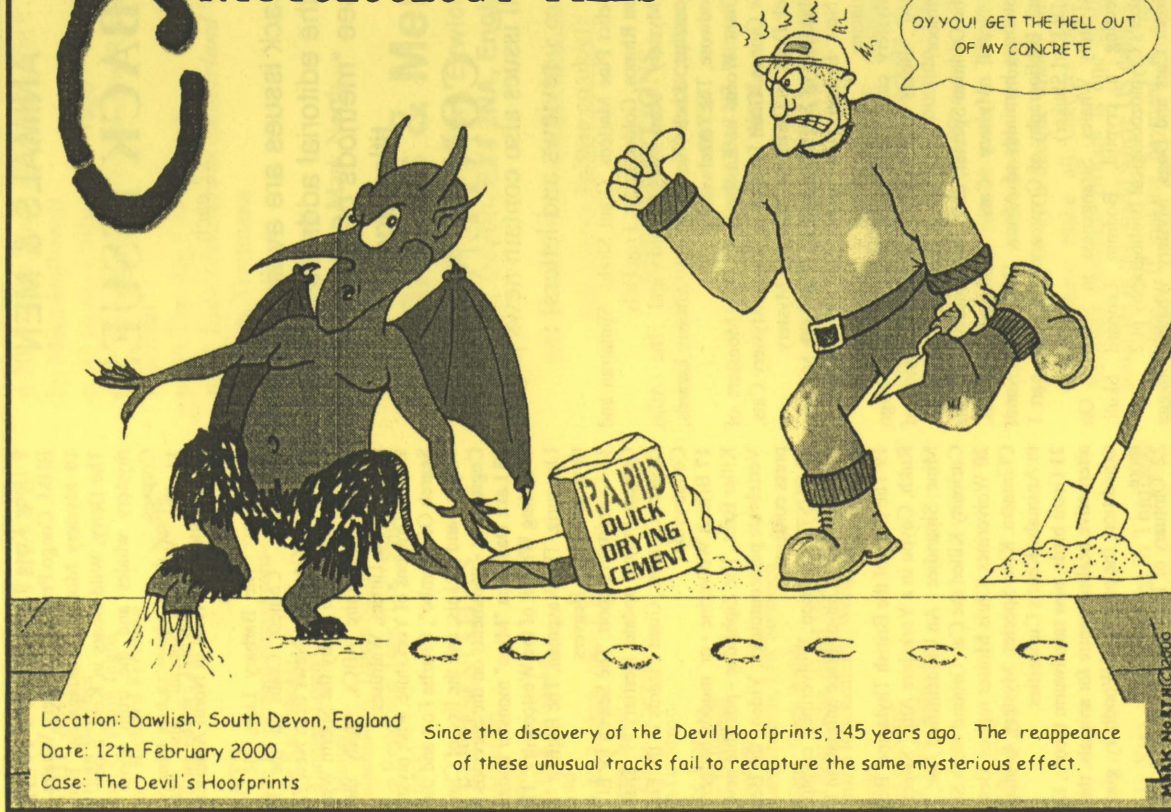
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- 11 The "Walruses Special", also: Feathered Dinosaurs, Ground Sloth Survival in North America, Mystery Whales, Initial Bipedalism.
- 12 Lions: The Barbary Lion, etc. More Feathered Dinosaurs, Chinese Crabs in the Thames, Mystery Animals of Germany, News from New Zealand.
- 13 Pangolins; also Moby the Sperm Whale, Barking Beast of Bath, Yorkshire ABCs, Molly the Singing Oyster, Leatherback Turtles, Walruses.
- 14 The Dragons of Yorkshire, Irish mystery animals, In Search Of "Gambo", Charlie Fort and the Vampire Sheep Slayer - and Jackals; and the first of Clinton Keeling's Cogitations - comments on the previous issue.
- 15 Lake Dakataua "Migo" monster update, The Weird Warbling Whatsit of the Westcountry, The Beast of Llangurig, The Waspman, The Bigfoot "Murders", and three articles on Beavers.
- 16 Expedition Report: The Search for El Chupacabra, Quagga Project update; Bestiary #1; Snakes with Legs; Eastern Cougars; Giant Lizards in the English Countryside?
- 17 British Wolverine - or muddy badger?, Turtle Tales, Killer Bees, The Zhiphiidae - possible new species, Vertebrate palaeontology, Video: the Beast of Bodmin press conference.
- 18 GUST expedition; Wolverines; crypto sharks; Puerto Rican lamprey, Out-of-place animals in Kent; Quaggas and hybrids.
- 19 The Case of the British Thylacine; Bestiary - The Rukh; Coypu in a Yorkshire Attic, Sweet Wallaby of Mine; Sipandjee - An Unidentified Ape; Ayrshire Tales; Curiosity Killed the Cat; Ground Sloth Survival.
- 20 Wolverines: Chris Moiser replies. Bestiary: The Chimaera. Kiwi Species. Mystery Animals of Japan. ESP in Animals. Kent's Curiosities.
- 21 Giant birds, new tatzelwurm theory, Kent big cats, alternative healing centre for animals, the Kota Mama expedition, the parrots of Woodbury, giant anaconda and more.
22. Obituary of Toby the CFZ Dog, Big Fish Project, Evolution of mustelids, The CIA and Cryptozoology, The Father of Cryptozoology retires etc

The CRYPTOZOOLOGY FILES By MARK NORTH



Location: Dawlish, South Devon, England
Date: 12th February 2000
Case: The Devil's Hoofprints

Since the discovery of the Devil Hoofprints, 145 years ago. The reappearance of these unusual tracks fail to recapture the same mysterious effect.

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...What shall we do today? Stealer? Well, why not go and shoot ourselves some...